

An article by Frances L. Hamilton in the
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Landscaping for the birds

Planning gives your yard an edge

The great wasteland of the American lawn--it's our nation's most pathetically underused environmental resource. And now's the time to start doing something about it.

Spend the dull days of February planning a horticultural attack on your back yard, to make it a haven for birds and other wildlife

There are all kinds of high-minded justifications for this kind of landscape scheme. Thoughtfully carried out, it benefits birds and other wild creatures. It makes the neighborhood more attractive to people. It enriches your own life by making your surroundings more interesting, more restful--and more valuable on the real estate market.

But that's not why I plan my plantings for birds. I do it because I like it. I enjoy the company of birds, their companionable calling and melodious songs, their bright presence in my garden.

Even in a tiny city courtyard, birds can be drawn in with a modest flower border furnished with plants whose seeds nourish birds, plus a couple of trees chosen not only for their beauty, but also for their usefulness to birds.

Amazingly small fragments of habitat will attract unexpected species--two shining examples are the swamp sparrows that nested one summer in a tub of cattails in a reflecting pool on the Mall in downtown Washington, and the hummingbird that stopped one fall at an isolated flowering herb (pineapple thyme, I think) on Washington Street in center city Wilming-

ton.

In a suburban neighborhood, a lawn planted for birds brings along other wildlife as a bonus--rabbits, raccoons, turtles, toads, harmless snakes (in Delaware, that's really all we have), gray squirrels, flying squirrels. The back yard can become a very interesting place.

Three things attract birds: food, shelter, and water. Bird feeders, nest boxes and birdbaths will help--but providing food and shelter by way of your plantings is more effective and, in the long run, easier.

Besides, nest boxes attract only the birds that nest in cavities; most bird feeders attract only the birds that eat seeds or suet. A thoughtfully landscaped yard will pull in a much greater variety.

House shoppers who are nature enthusiasts can save themselves a lot of trouble by choosing a house with grounds already attractive to wildlife. Ideally, the place will have some natural water--pond, stream or marsh--and a variety of habitats.

Woodland, thickets and meadow produce the greatest variety of birds; lawn is almost devoid of wildlife and deep woods are sparsely populated. What you want is EDGE--the borders between woods and thicket, thicket and meadow are richest in wildlife.

If you want to improve the habitat on a place you already own, start by making an inventory of what's there. Consider what's available in your neighbor's yards, too--birds don't observe human property boundaries. Look for sources of water, for evergreen and deciduous trees, for thickets, for weedy areas.

Draw a rough map of your property, showing its natural resources--lawn, shade trees, hedge, windbreak, whatever is already there. If you have an annoying wet spot somewhere on the place, put it on the map and con-

sider it a treasure--you can develop it as a tiny marsh.

Now, start planning your own yard, making it a rich part of the neighborhood environment. Keep variety in mind. Think edge.

Landscape-planning help is available not only in ordinary garden books but also in special publications about landscaping for wildlife. Some reliable books are named in one of the lists accompanying this story; the best one I've seen that's still in print is "The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds" by Stephen W. Kress (Charles Scribner's Sons, \$24.95).

Another handy aid is a planning kit sold by the National Wildlife Federation. It comes with booklets, plant lists, a template to help draw your plan, graph paper, etc. To order it by mail, send your check for \$19.70 (\$16.95 plus \$2.75 for postage and handling) and a request for Item No. 79907, "Gardening With Wildlife" kit, to National Wildlife Federation, 8925 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, VA 22184.

Other lists accompanying this article name plants particularly loved by birds, including trees, shrubs, vines, hummingbird favorites--and invasive plants that birds love but you won't. Memorize that last list, because many otherwise reliable authorities will recommend the rampaging plants that are on it.

Your garden doesn't have to be rank and scrubby to attract birds. Make it pretty; choose your trees and shrubs for beauty as well as wildlife potential. Try to stick to native American plants--they tend to be more disease-resistant than the foreigners, and they're less likely to become invasive. Select plants with varying fruiting periods so that there's food available throughout the year.

Your privacy screen or windbreak will double as shelter for birds and animals, and will offer food as well if you select the proper trees for

it.

Substitute ground covers for grass in parts of your lawn where there's not much foot traffic, selecting low-growing plants that produce berries for birds.

Vary heights--different birds operate at different levels. Plant vines and shrubs at the bases of your trees.

Include in your flower borders some plants that produce seeds for the birds--possibilities include aster, bachelor's button, calendula, campanula, chrysanthemum, black-eyed Susan, coreopsis, dusty miller, marigold, phlox, portulaca, and zinnia. Leave the dead flowers on the plants after they've bloomed so they'll go to seed for the birds.

Ground-feeding birds such as towhees like to scratch in leaf litter under trees and shrubs, so don't keep the ground swept clean. Allow dead leaves to pile up and decay. The litter acts as a mulch, keeping the ground moist and loose. In the more manicured sections of your garden, you can keep a tidy look and confine loose leaves by edging shrub borders with bricks or timbers.

Ground-feeding birds also love changes in slope. The terracing can be planted in horizontal material such as cotoneasters or lowbush blueberry.

If you're lucky enough to have woods, keep in mind that an occasional woodland opening is attractive to wildlife. Don't be such a fussbudget that you clear away the dead limbs and snags in your woods--they're nesting places for woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice and other birds.

In addition to your plantings, you probably will want some bird feeders, a birdbath if you have no pond or stream, perhaps even a dust-bathing pit for birds.

Many commercial birdbaths are too steep and too deep. The bath should have a very gentle incline into the water, which should be no more than 2 or 3 inches deep.

Shy birds such as warblers and wood thrushes are more likely to visit the bath if it's tucked into a shady spot, though such a site is vulnerable to cats. If cats are a threat in your neighborhood, keep the bird-bath out in the open. Birds also prefer baths at ground level, where the rain puddles are--but again, if cats are a problem, put your bath on a pedestal.

Many birds, including kinglets, sparrows, even hawks, love dust baths. They fluff themselves and flutter into the dust--perhaps to rid the body of feather lice. Whatever the reason, a dusting area attracts birds. To make one, prepare an area 3 feet on each side and 6 inches deep, edged with brick. Fill it with a mixture of one part sand, one part loam, one part sifted ash.

If undergrowth is sparse on your undeveloped lot, a brush pile will stand wildlife in good stead while your new landscaping is getting started. Even a small pile of evergreen boughs will provide shelter for an amazing number of little birds, but laying a foundation of logs or, even better, ceramic drain tiles will give small animals a safe hiding place as well.

Pile cut shrubs and pruned branches on top of the foundation to make a peaked mound. You will be astonished at the number of creatures that will call a brush pile home.

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American holly (*Ilex opaca*) -- evergreen shelter with fruits loved by bluebird, cedar waxwing, mockingbird. Plant female trees in clumps with one male tree for pollination.

Apple (*Malus pumila*) -- beloved by bluebirds as a nest site, also offers fruits for birds, fragrant blossoms-- but DON'T SPRAY! Old, neglected trees can be revived as grand havens for birds by pruning roots and limbs, fertilizing.

Crabapples -- small flowering trees. Pick varieties with small fruits, including the native *Malus coronaria* and the varieties Arnold, Bob White, Donald Wyman, Japanese, Dorothea, Hillieri, Jackie, Mary, Potter, Sargent, Siberian, Snowbank, Toringo, Drifter and Tea.

Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) -- that choice native ornamental whose berries are eaten by 36 bird species. Plant as it occurs naturally in partial shade, moist but well-drained soil--to help avoid disease, insect troubles.

Hawthorns -- small, spiny trees important for fruit, nest sites. Cockspur hawthorn (*Crataegus crus-galli*) and Washington thorn (*C. phaenopyrum*) are especially useful.

Mulberry -- few trees are as attractive to songbirds as the messy old red mulberry (*Morus rubra*). Give it a space far from sidewalks or patios, so the fallen fruit won't annoy you.

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Oaks -- acorns of the white oak (*Quercus alba*), black oak (*Q. velutina*), pin oak (*Q. palustris*), northern red oak (*Q. rubra*) and scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*) are important to birds and mammals. Wood ducks love acorns of the bur oak (*Q. macrocarpa*).

Pine -- important for shelter and nesting and 38 bird species eat the seeds of the Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*).

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) -- a weedy tree you probably won't plant--but if the birds plant it for you in a convenient place, keep it. Pileated woodpecker, kingbird, catbird, bluebird and red-eyed vireo love the fruit; leaves turn bright orange in fall.

Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) -- disease-resistant tree, beautiful in autumn, whose seeds are loved by many birds. Plant where the sticky seedballs won't be a nuisance.

Tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) -- beautiful shade tree with handsome flowers loved by hummingbirds.

Wild cherry -- including black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), whose fruits attract 47 bird species, and pin cherry (*P. pennsylvanica*), loved by bluebirds. Messy trees--plant away from walks, patios.

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Shrubs and Vines

Alder (*Alnus serrulata*) -- tall shrub useful for natural plantings around ponds and streams. Offers shelter, also seeds for goldfinches, pine siskins, redpolls.

American elder (*Sambucus canadensis*) -- late-summer food and nesting cover.

Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*) -- used in hedges; great nest site plus preferred food for pine siskin.

Blueberry, highbush (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and lowbush (*V. angustifolium*) -- important for food; needs acid soil.

Brambles (including blackberries, raspberries and their relatives) -- their tangles provide shelter; important food source.

Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) -- a woody vine you won't plant, but leave it in your woods if it's there. Berries are important to 20 bird species, deer love the leaves and the thickets provide nest sites.

Huckleberries -- for food and nest sites, especially box huckleberry (*Gaylussacia brachycera*), a beautiful native evergreen sub-shrub up to 2 feet high whose fruits are eaten by 51 bird species; and black huckleberry (*G. baccata*), which is fruit for 24 species.

Inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*) -- evergreen shrub for shelter, berries.

Red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*) -- dense cover plus plentiful fruit.

Serviceberries -- small trees and shrubs of the American woodlands, provides abundant fruit. Downy shad-blow (*Amelanchier arborea*) is an excellent choice as large shrub or small tree for a shady yard.

Viburnums -- shrubs valuable for shelter and emergency food, especially American highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*).

Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) -- native vine; berries are an important food.

Wild grapes -- many species; provide fruit and nesting sites.

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Hummingbirds' Favorites

Azalea -- the flowering shrubs.

Beebalm or Oswego tea (*Monarda didyma*) -- perennial flower of the mint family. Tends to mildew in our area, so give it an airy spot.

Black locust -- a flowering tree, also called yellow locust

or false acacia (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*).

Buckeye -- flowering trees including horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and Ohio buckeye (*A. glabra*).

Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*) -- creeping carpet plant with blue flowers in late spring.

Butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidi*) -- shrub with lilaclike blooms, known for attracting butterflies but also loved by hummingbirds.

Butterfly milkweed -- deep-rooted perennial (*Asclepias tuberosa*) whose brilliant orange flowers also attract butterflies. Resents transplanting; buy container-grown plants or grow from seed.

Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) -- perennial wild flower, needs moist soil, shade.

Columbine -- perennial flowers including the native *Aquilegia canadensis*.

Coralbells -- perennial garden flower.

Coralberry -- native shrub with reddish-purple fruits (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*).

Dahlia -- many types of garden flowers.

Evening primrose -- perennial and biennial flowers (some are invasive).

Fire Pink (*Silene virginica*) -- a native wild flower.

Four-O'clock -- an old-fashioned garden flower (*Mirabilis jalapa*) grown as an annual.

Fuschias -- many kinds, including those in hanging baskets.

Gladiolus -- especially the bright red variety Flash.

Hibiscus -- flowering shrubs, especially the old-fashioned althaea or Rose-of-Sharon (*H. syriacus*).

Hollyhock -- old-fashioned perennial.

Honeysuckle -- including limber honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*), a shrubby vine; orange honeysuckle (*L. ciliosa*)--a shrub; and trumpet honeysuckle (*L. sempervirens*), a twining shrub--but avoid the invasive Japanese honeysuckle (*L. japonica*).

Jewelweed or snapweed -- a member of the *impatiens* family, not refined enough for the cultivated garden, but let it grow for the hummers in wild areas.

Larkspur -- the *delphiniums*, perennial and annual flowers.

Lily -- especially tiger and turkscap lilies, flowering bulbs.

Mimosa tree or silk tree (*Albizzia julibrissin*).

Morning glory -- annual flowering vine.

Nasturtium -- annual flower.

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Pea tree -- a hedge plant (*Caragana arborescens*). A new one
on me, but it sounds worthy of investigating.

Penstemon -- various perennial flowers.

Petunia -- annual flower.

Phlox -- perennial flower.

Scarlet runner bean (*Phaseolus coccineus*) -- a vine, grown
as an annual for ornament.

Scarlet sage -- annual flower.

Snapdragon -- annual flower.

Torch lily -- various garden perennials are also called
flame flower or poker-plant.

Trumpet creeper -- shrubby perennial vine (*Campsis radicans*).

Tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) -- majestic flowering
shade tree.

Verbena -- annual flower.

Weigela -- flowering shrub.

Zinnia -- annual flower.

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Helpful Books

Attracting Birds: From the Prairies to the Atlantic, by
Verne E. Davison -- supremely useful, but out of
print, try your library.

The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds, by Stephen W.
Kress, sponsored by the Laboratory of Ornithology,
Cornell University, \$24.95 (Charles Scribner's
Sons).

The Backyard Bird Watcher, by George H. Harrison, \$16.95
(Simon and Schuster).

Beyond the Bird Feeder, by John V. Dennis, \$13.95 (Knopf).

The Bird Feeder Book, by Donald & Lillian Stokes, \$8.95
(Little, Brown & Co.).

A Complete Guide to Bird Feeding, by John V. Dennis, \$18.95
(Alfred a. Knopf).

Watching Birds, by Roger F. Pasquier, \$9.95 (Houghton Mif-
flin Co.).

Wildlife in Your Garden, (subtitle: "Dealing with deer, rab-
bits, raccoons, moles, crows, sparrows and other
of nature's creatures in ways that keep them
around but away from your fruits and vegetables")
by Gene Logsdon, \$14.95 (Rodale Press).

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The Lunatic Fringe

The birds love these ramping vegetables, but you and your neighbors will hate them forever. You'll see them recommended for wildlife plantings, even in otherwise reliable books, but for your sake--don't plant them!

Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) -- a smothering native American vine that blankets parts of Chester County, Pa.

Elaeagnus shrubs, any of them -- autumn olive (*E. umbellata*) and Russian olive (*E. angustifolia*) are spread everywhere by seeds in birds' droppings.

Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicere japonica*) -- pretty is as pretty does, and it's invasive.

Kudzu vine (*Pueraria thunbergiana*) -- a handsome devil that weighs down woodland by the acre. It's most pervasive in the South, but also is smothering wooded areas near Kennett Square, Pa.

Multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) -- a hedgerow plant that is choking fields all over the Delmarva Peninsula.

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The foregoing article was spotted and forwarded to us by our roving correspondent in Northern Delaware, Joe Buday. Thanks, Joe!